

"WHERE DOES DADDY GO?":
AN INVESTIGATION OF INCREASING MATERNAL SEMANTIC COMPLEXITY

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Linguistic inquiry, which has focused on speech addressed to children, has expanded in recent years to include the study of language in its sociocultural context. Researchers in this area have begun to concentrate on aspects of parent-child interaction which take into consideration grammatical knowledge that extends beyond the evaluation of structure. Rules that underlie communicative competence have been analyzed. Specifically, researchers are considering parent-child interaction parameters which will permit analysis of structural and functional differences in unique semantic domains.

Deixis, the speech of common reference, which carries an assumption on the speaker's part that the listener knows what the communication is about, is a prominent aspect of adult speech to children during the early language-learning years (Newport, Gleitman and Gleitman, 1977; Carpenter, 1979). Deictic linguistic devices anchor utterances to the communicative setting in which they occur. It is "context bound" and depends heavily on environmental support for correct interpretation. Parisi and Antinucci (1977) argue that linguistic deictic interchanges between parent and child are particularly appropriate during the early language learning years. Since deictic reference reduces psycholinguistic processing constraints through use of linguistic structures which are partially defined environmentally, the child is free to focus on the linguistic input which does not have environmental support. Linguistic deixis demands, as a condition of appropriate use, that the listener already be familiar with the referent which is deictically marked.

Linguistic deixis has traditionally been divided into three categories: person deixis, which identifies the speaker-listener aspects of a message; place deixis, which marks the location aspects of participants or of objects referred to in the conversation; and time deixis, which is a linguistic reference used to indicate when the utterance is taking place. Fillmore(1974) introduced an additional deictic category which he labels symbolic.

Interpretation of symbolic deixis depends upon linguistic interchanges which require knowledge about certain routines, family practices or positions and physical contexts. What do you do first thing in the morning? or How does daddy go to work? are examples of symbolic deictic usage, since interpretation on the part of the listener depends upon shared knowledge of familiar routines. Fillmore (1974:41) cites the routine and familiar telephone exchange, Is John there? as exemplifying deictic symbolic usage. There, in this instance, is understood to mean the place where the listener is.

The subject of the development of linguistic deixis has received only fractional treatment to date. Bruner (1975a, 1975b) and Bates, Camaioni and Volterra (1975) have traced the beginnings of deixis to the prelinguistic period. These researchers postulate that deictic markers arise from the interactive give-and-take sequences which occur between the mothers and infants long before expressive language appears.

The focus of this study was the processes which mothers employ in introducing symbolic deictic reference in interactive sequences which occur during play situations with their children. The subjects for this study were thirty (30) middle class mother-child pairs, who were selected in a stratified random manner from an eligible population as subjects for participation. Three equal groups were then constructed from the sample: mothers of children in the age range eighteen to twenty-three months, mothers of children in the age range twenty-four to twenty-nine months, and mothers of children in the age range thirty to thirty-five months. The language data were collected from spontaneous conversations between mother-child pairs during unstructured play interaction centered around high interest nursery school toys. These language samples were recorded on a portable cassette audio recorder using a non-directional microphone. The linguistic data were these thirty minute mother-child recorded interactions.

Interactional frames containing symbolic deixis were then analyzed for each group. In the younger group, eighteen to twenty-three months of age, maternal symbolic deixis occurred in play telephone interaction exchanges, in the introduction of politeness rules, sympathy expressions, people and place situations, and in eliciting action schema information taking the form What does X say? As can be seen from the examples which follow, symbolic deictic input was simple, repetitive and centered on

immediate happenings. The children were directly tutored in the kinds of appropriate responses to make if suitable answers were not spontaneously given.

Examples are:

- Phone situations: a. Hello Katie
Is Katie there?
Is Katie there?
Good-bye.
- b. Say hello.....hello.
Ask if Jane is there.
Is baby Jane there?
- Politeness rules: a. Here's a little boy.
What do you say to him?
Say "hi" to this little boy.
Say "What are ya doing today?"
Ask him what he's doing.
- Sympathy: a. Oh no! She bumped her head.
What do you say to her?
- People-place situations: a. Do you know where daddy is?
Where is daddy?
Where does daddy go?
Where is daddy, hummm?
- b. Where is sister Lisa?
Lisa got on the bus.
Where's she gonna go?
- What does X say: a. What does a train say?
A dog, what's he saying?
- b. Is that the kitty cat?
What does the kitty cat do?

Eliciting direct information with the What does X say? frame was the most frequently occurring symbolic deictic interchange used by the mothers of this younger group. In one instance, this was combined with a situational routine in an exchange involving

What does X say? a. What does the doggie say?
 What does Major say?
 What do we have to tell Major?
 Right, "Quiet Major."

Table 1

	Situational Frequency	Mothers Participating in Each Category
Telephone situations	10	5
People-place situations	13	6
Politeness rules	3	3
Sympathy routines	1	1
What does X say?	<u>29</u>	6
Total number of symbolic deictic referents	56	

Phone situations: a. What do you say on the telephone?
Oh, you forgot to say, "How are you?"

- b. I'm fine.
Ask if Sarah's there.
Yes, yes, Sarah's right here.
Do you want to talk to her?
- c. Can you make it ring?
Ring, ring, ring.
What do you say?
- d. Who's on the phone?
Daddy?
You say "Hi daddy."
Is daddy working?
Ask him if he's working hard.
Say, "Are you working hard, daddy?"
Say, "Bye-bye, daddy."

Symbolic deictic reference involving persons and places now included people and locations outside the childrens' homes and incidences happening in the recent past. Examples are:

People-place
situations:

- a. Gonna teach letters?
Is that what you do at school?
- b. An there's the sun.
Where's the sun today?
Is it up in the sky?
Sun in the sky, right.
- c. Oh, oh.
What are you scared of?
Are you afraid of the plane?
Oh well, monna won't go on the plane
anymore, O.K.?
- d. Do you know what this is?
Know what that's supposed to be?
If I put it by the chair do you
know what it is?
What is that?
That's a nursery school table.

The stereotyped frame, What does X say? was substantially reduced in appearance, but was still present and parents were still occasionally supplying answers in this frame.

- What does X say?
- a. What does the train say?
Chuga, chuga, choo-choo.
 - b. What do duckies say?
Like grandma's duckies.
What does the duckie say?

Two new categories were added in this age group. Children were now asked about holidays and health related incidents. Examples are:

- Holidays:
- a. That's like a bunny.
It's like Easter, huh?
What do bunnies do at Easter?
 - b. Let's take a look at what she brought.
This is almost like Christmas, huh?
- Health:
- c. It needs a shoe here.
What happens without shoes?
His feet are going to get cold...yeah.
 - d. Yeah, you put water in the tub.
Then, whatta ya do?
You take a bath in the tub?
 - e. Let's see...oooooh.
Who's going to cook dinner, Katie.

Table two presents the total number of symbolic deictic referents which occurred within the twenty-four to twenty-nine month old group and also shows the numbers occurring in each specific category. See Table 2 next page.

Table 2
Symbolic Deictic Reference
Twenty-Four to Twenty-Nine Months

	Situational Frequency	Mothers Participating in Each Category
Telephone situations	6	4
People-place situations	19	9
Pliteness rules	-	-
Sympathy routines	-	-
Health	7	4
Holidays	2	2
What does X say?	6	4
Total number of symbolic deictic referents	40	

By the time the children were thirty to thirty-five months of age eighty-one incidences of symbolic deictic reference occurred. Children were now being asked how daddy got to work, how siblings got to school and church, what happened at school, what kind of a friend a kitty-cat was, and were also expected to be familiar with routine family happenings at birthday parties.

In telephone incidences the children were now initiating opening phone sequences and, therefore, the directly tutored social opening exchanges disappeared. Maternal symbolic deixis which occurred in phone exchanges with this age group now contained references to vacations, birthdays, neighborhood playmates and happenings at parks and zoos. Examples are:

- Phone situations:
- a. Hi Zachery, how are you today?
What do ya think about all this snow outside?
What do you do in the snow?
 - b. I'm gonna ring this telephone.
Hello, is Nathan there?
Whose birthday is it today?
Oh, what'd ja do on his birthday?
 - c. Remember what we called choo-choos in Lava?

On our vacation?
Trains?
Did you hear their whistle?
What did it sound like?
Oh, that's how the wheels go round.

- d. What do we say when we say good-bye
to a person?
No, that's rude, isn't it?
You wouldn't want someone to say
that to you.

In people-place situations mothers now asked children about where appropriate furniture went in nursery schools, what foods came from gardens, what kind of stores they went to and what their favorite television characters did. Examples are:

People-place
situations:

- a. Come, look at these rooms and
tell me where the potties go.
What room did that look like?
Can you find the classroom?
Do you think they'll cut things out
with paper like we do?
- b. What does Spider man have?
What does Superman do?
- c. What color's that?
What's Missy's favorite color?
She likes that color.
- d. O.K., we'll pretend.
What's from the garden?
Carrots, who eats carrots?
Who else eats carrots?
- e. Let's go to the store.
You tell me where the store is?
What kind of a store is it?
- f. What happened the other day at the park?
What happened?

- e. Does that smell like your toothpaste?
What toothpaste do you use to brush
your teeth?

The What does X say? routine had almost completely disappeared. Only one mother used this frame and then only briefly. Once she started the routine she continued this interaction for several instances, much as mothers of the younger children did. An example is:

- What does X say? a. How does the kitty go?
 O.K., how does the doggie go?
 How does the cow go?
 How does the rooster go?

Table three presents the total number of symbolic deictic referents which occurred within the thirty to thirty-five month old group and also shows the numbers occurring in each specific category.

Table 3

Symbolic Deictic Reference
Thirty to Thirty-Five Months

	Situational Frequency	Mothers Participating in Each Category
Telephone situations	10	6
People-place situations	41	9
Politeness rules	combined with phone	1
Sympathy routines	-	-
Health	11	6
Holidays	14	6
What does X say?	5	1
Total number of symbolic deictic referents	81	

Table four, which follows, presents an age-wise comparison of changes in the frequency of the specific deictic categories which were considered.

Table 4
Symbolic Deictic Reference
For All Groups

	Group One 18-23 months	Group Two 24-29 months	Group Three 30-35 months
Telephone situations	10	6	10
People-place situations	13	19	41
Politeness rules	3	-	combined with phone
Sympathy routines	1	-	
Health	-	7	11
Holidays	-	2	14
What does X say?	<u>29</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>
Total numbers of symbolic deictic referents	56	40	81

Not all of the mothers in each age group engaged in every interactional type of symbolic deixis which was classified in this research. Table five, which follows, shows the number of mothers who engaged in symbolic deixis in each category by age group.

Table 5
Symbolic Deictic Reference
Mothers Participating

	Group One 18-23 Months	Group Two 24-29 Months	Group Three 30-35 Months
Telephone situations	5	4	6
People-place situations	6	9	9
Politeness rules	3	-	1
Sympathy routines	1	-	-
Health	-	4	6
Holidays	-	2	6
What does X say?	6	4	1

As can be seen from this study, all of these middle-class mothers worked very hard to tutor their children in discovering the sociolinguistic exchanges that comprise communicative competence in specific linguistic environments. Through the use of symbolic deictic reference, they taught their children how language functions in different linguistic interactions in various situational contexts. These children were tutored in what is appropriate for speakers to say as well as in what is acceptable in a listener response. They were systematically exposed not only to increasing complexity in symbolic deictic interchanges but also to varying functions of symbolic deixis in given contexts. Parents who engage in these tutoring strategies teach their children that different meaning potential is typically associated with various environments. These differences did not appear in syntax, morphology, phonology or lexicons of the parents, although mothers did follow known patterns of simplifications with the younger children. They were, rather, differences in interpretation, evaluation and orientation on the part of the mothers in socializing interactions surrounding known routines, family practices and positions, and physical contexts. In using symbolic deictic reference the focus was on the variable function of language within these contexts. It would seem that this input would have significant influence on the child's socialization and on his interpretation of the meaning potential that is available to him and that can be exploited by him as a participant.

Symbolic deixis as it was used by these middle-class mothers would appear to have a far-reaching effect on the child's social learning. Perhaps, also, it has a significant effect on the learning styles and practices that are necessary for the child's success in the educational process.

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